

Kamla Das' Journey from Being a Tragic Heroine to A Feminist Voice for The World: A Perspective of Lovelessness, Finding Love and The Divine Form of Love Through Her Poems

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Abstract

Kamla Das, the famous Anglian writer stands out as one of the most prominent voices of femininity and feminism. She yearned to make a space for herself in this world and chose 'pen' to be her faithfully companion. Her individuality and her existence stands like the banyan tree today, giving shade and shelter to many women suffering, and finding ways to fight out their battles to restore their persona. Kamla Das' works become the torch bearing lights for many a women, in need of support and struggle. Her works are not mere writings on pieces of paper, rather golden words of encouragement for the world to live it up and learn and survive, just like the Albatross, resurging from one's own ashes and flying high.

Keywords- lovelessness, mystical, metaphysical, feministic tendencies, resurgence of soul.

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Introduction:

Kamla Das is a poet possessing philosophical, mystical, spiritual and feministic tendencies. Celebrating the various facets of life, she chooses to dedicate herself, her poetry and her life to the celebration of love. In the act of this celebration she has chosen to suffer, strife, and survive. In the end coming out victorious by writing out loud to be known as a “confessional poet”. Only by writing an expression could the woman writer succeed in breaking down existing social power structures and create a place for herself in the world of masculine hierarchies. Talking about the woman writer, they could alter each other's existing marginalized position and accept their rightful right as a significant part of society, only through their expression . By writing the self, the woman writer could challenge accepted notions of the female and redraft general opinion on the feminine mystique. This exaggerated role of the woman writer is emphasized by another feminist writer Rosalind Bracken bury, “Nobody writes in a vacuum, away from the political and social structures in which we live. We breathe the air of today's thought, we digest it in everything we read and consider; also, we create it. This is largely the role of women today: to create, present and consider a new world.”

As the emphasis on demystifying the myth of the female generating a new role for the woman in society became popular and more women writings began to appear in public. The feeling of social responsibility in reconstructing her social role gave the woman writers courage and confidence. **Freudian psychoanalysis** were the verbalization of individual experience and was considered therapeutic. It made the autobiographical mode popular, the idea of autobiography as expression became an accepted means for the woman writer to explore her personal identity as well as create a newer and better perception on gender issues. Yet, by the very act of writing, the woman writer was constructed to be breaking social norms due to the valorization of silence as a desirable “feminine” attribute. By verbalizing, the woman writer was attempting a breaking up of the power structures of hitherto acceptable patriarchal discourses. Linda Anderson theorizes upon this aspect of woman's autobiographical discourse, “It is necessary to take into account the fact that the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged by the very nature of that activity itself in rewriting the stories that already exist about her, since by seeking to publicize herself she is violating an important cultural construction or her femininity as passive or hidden. She is resisting or changing what is known about her. Her place within culture, the place from which she writes, is produced by difference and produces differences.”

The binary oppositions engendered by a woman writer's autobiography call for a decent ring of the thus for accepted phallogentric schemata. Her hesitant confessions or representation are dubbed subversive and by extension become controversial, creating a mental block in the hitherto for accepting readership. Her “otherness” is exaggerated making her seem an exception rather than a mouthpiece of the female community.

Kamla das' works emerge out as substantial voices on the Freudian psycho analysis approach, where the phallogentric schemata can be observed from within her poetry. Her autobiography 'My Story', her poems such as 'the sunshine cat' , 'the freaks' , and 'the introduction' , have largely the same back ground of the patriarchal setup, the men dominated world and the not so powerful women. It is then that she chooses to express from within. Her femininity cannot be questioned, her feelings, her power packed emotions and the outlaw self rages to vocalize the feelings which every women suffers and survives through in a male dominated world.

For the world she becomes a controversial autobiographical writer having no control what so ever over her senses, feelings and desires. In 'My Story' ,It was marketed as “The compelling autobiography of the most controversial Indian writer.” Previewers viewed the work as one that would appeal to the male gaze and tickle their sensations “...the chapter headings accentuate the excitement” few saw the work as a woman's tale of woe, or paid heed to its themes of loneliness and subaltern anguish. Here, by the very act of defining female space, she was recognized as a threat to the adherents of patriarchal discourse. Severe critical dissent and adverse publicity followed suit and the writer had to withdraw into herself as a consequence.

The very qualities of forthrightness and expressiveness which would have been lauded in a male writer were pinpointed as her drawback. Thus, the writer who had attempted to define female space becomes different and unsure of her intrinsic worth. She feels compelled to provide an explanation for her work. In her Preface to 'My Story', Kamala Das explains her reasons for writing this “... the doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of a sudden death, and besides there were all the hospital bills to be taken care of.”

Her insecurity in this role as well as her fear of the accompanying social disgrace make her cringe in embarrassment. Yet, despite the public outcry and social disparagement that the writer encountered, she

enjoys the fulfillment that the creative activity involves for she states emphatically and quite rebelliously, “This book has cost me many things that I held dear, but I do not for a moment regret having written it. I have written several books in my lifetime, but none of them provided the pleasure the writing of *My Story* has given me.”

The tone of sincerity and the open confession of creative fulfillment in the writer's words underscore her character. The female autobiographer is viewed as radical and subversive when she writes the self and hence the diffidence and confusion that attends women's writing.

Notwithstanding the above, there are two other factors that are often brought up to demean the woman autobiographer- autobiography as mere personal hysteria supported by Freud, and autobiography as a fictional construct. Kamala Das, the autobiographer caters to both these factors and thereby lays herself open to criticism. She projects herself as the passive female. Incapable of action and relapses into hysteria when the milieu becomes intolerable for her. When confronted with her husband's adultery and the illness of her son, for instance, she describes her state of mind thus:

“The growing misery inside me, the darkness that lay congealed removed from my face all that was once pretty. I was like a house with its lights put out. I walked up, up and down in our rooms wearing a Torn saree and although my legs ached for rest, the movement went on and on as if they were propelled by some evil power (p. 103).”

Despite the emphasis on autobiography and the aspects of personal confusion by Kamala Das, one is also aware of the work's fictional element. The very title itself '*My Story*' gives us an indication of the fictional aspect of the work. This is well in keeping with psychoanalytic theories of autobiography. They emphasize the inconsistencies achieved by selective retention during memorizing. Hence, the autobiographical narrative runs the risk of becoming merely a piece of fictional construction, quite at variance with the biography of the individual concerned. As James Olney explains, “In the act of remembering the past in the present the, autobiographer imagines into existence another world and surely it is not the same, in any real sense, as that past world that does not, under any circumstances, nor however much we may wish it now exist.”

The publication of “summer in Calcutta” changed the history of Indo-Anglian poetry, especially of women writers. It was a time when “...Indian women has moved on from such colonial and nationalist themes as the rewriting of legends, praise of peasants and from general ethical statements to writing about personal experiences. While outmoded diction and sentiments were at last overtaken in favour of a more contemporary and less artificial manner, the subject matter of the women poets was often limited to well-meaning platitudes about romantic love, which were treated without depth, complexity, interest or even the projection of much emotion”.

“Summer in Calcutta”, presented to the Indian reader a different type of poetry. Earlier poets looked at the Holy Books, historical characters for their themes, while Kamla Das looked into her own self. Her poems were like parcels of dynamite. It could explode on your face, specially spreading its contents all around bringing to naked eye the oppression and enslavement of women in our own Modern age.

As Keki Daruwalla rightly says, “The intensity of feeling, ably controlled in her better poems, and the uninhibited manner in which she treated sex, immediately won for her a big audience. Kamala Das is pre-

eminently a poet of love and pain, one stalking the other through a near neurotic world. There is an all pervasive sense of but throughout. Love, the lazy animal hungers of the flesh, hurt and humiliation are the wrap and woof of her poetic fabric. She seldom ventures outside this personal world". In fact, "...she goes diving deep into her own self, unraveling mysteries which were never known to Indian women, or more honestly speaking, none dared to unravel them in the past, in such a away, in such an orthodox, custom-ridden, conservative society. Such poems, would have been burnt down had she lived half a century ago and dared to write the stuff she writes now".

Bruce King is right when he writes. "Das's themes go beyond stereotyped longings and complaints. Even her feelings of loneliness and disappointments are part of a longer than life personality obsessive in its awareness of itself, yet creating: a drama of selfhood".

He can never persuade her to forget that she is a women, who craves for love, companionship and understanding. When she published her poems, "on the one hand it produced derisive laughter but on the other, more scholarly people often appreciated it as a maiden effort of an Indian woman to express herself without much inhibition circumscribed by the false and hypocritical rules of a conservative society".

Thus Kamla Das writes to live and lives to write. Her poetry has given her life meaning. Her sensitivity and her fondness for her kind have enabled her to make not only her space in this world, but space for many like her. From Madhvikutty, to Kamla das and then finally Suriya, her journey on the path of finding "love" has been achieved. Where she struggles deep within to find physical manifestation of love, she reaches the stage of metaphysics or metaphysical love through her writings via self exploration. Kamla das clears her position as a poet, a lover and her status of finding divine love, with herself, with nature and with God. The kind of love that she discovers through her poems adds a delight to her unraveling mysteries of the human body and human soul. The openness and the honesty that the readers find in her writings present an emotional sweep and lyrical rapture which surpasses all dilemmas and predicaments of human mind and thus the body is safely anchored within the soul.

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